

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

OMB-01 /062 W

----- 087500

R 261531Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6498

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 5462

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, EC

SUBJ: THE CARROT AND THE STICK: THREATS AGAINST POLITICAL ACTIVITY

ACCOMPANY RELEASE OF TRUJILLO AND DROPPING CHARGES AGAINST
PRADO

1. SUMMARY:. THE GOE UNDERTOOK TWO SIGNIFICANT MOVES LAST WEEK IN ITS CONTINUING BALANCING ACT BETWEEN TOLERATING POLITICAL DISSENT AND MAKING CLEAR THAT THERE ARE LIMITS TO ITS PATIENCE. FIRST, THE NEW HARD-LINING MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT GEN. GUILLERMO DURAN, ANNOUNCED IN A PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE HAD "POSITIVE INFORMATION" THAT CERTAIN POLITICAL FIGURES WERE FORMING A "CIVIC FRONT" AGAINST THE MILITARY-RUN GOE, AND WARNED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT PERMIT WHAT IT CONSIDERES TO BE "TRAITOROUS CONSPIRING", AND FURTHER, THAT THE POLITICAL FIGURES INVOLVED WOULD DISCOVER IT "A DISASTROUS FANTASY" IF THEY TRIED TO ORGANIZE SUPPORT AGAINST THE ARMED FORCES. HIS STATEMENT WAS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY ATTACKED IN STRIDENT (BY CONTEMPORARY ECUADOREAN STANDARDS) TONES BY BOTH THE PRESS AND POLITICAL PARTIES. THEN, TWO DAYS LATER, THE GOE RELEASED FROM CONFINEMENT THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, JULIO CESAR TRUJILLO, AND LIFTED THE ARREST ORDERS AGAINST JULIO PRADO, FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER AND PROMINENT JOURNALISTIC CRITIC

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OF THE REGIME. END SUMMARY.

2. NEWLY-APPOINTED MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT GEN GUILLERMO DURAN ARCENTALES, WHO HAD BEEN PREDICTED TO BE SOMETHING OF A HARD-LINER WHEN HE TOOK OVER THE MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT LAST MAY (QUITO 4131) STATED IN A PRESS CONFERENCE ON JULY 16, 1975, THAT HE WAS AWARE OF SUBVERSIVE GROUPS FORMING IN ECUADOR, INTENDING "TO FRUSTRATE AN HONEST REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT." HE SAID HE HAD ISSUED ORDERS TO PREVENT "AGGRESSION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ARMED FORCES." HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE GOVERNMENT WANTED TO CREATE A CLIMATE OF PEACE AND LABOR "BASED ON SINCERE RESPECT FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF AN AUTHENTIC DEMOCRACY," AND REVIEWED THE GOE'S EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN A "FRANK AND LASTING DIALOGUE WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES." HE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT "THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT PERMIT ANY ACTION OF A CONSPIRATORIAL NATURE" AND SAID IT WOULD BE "A DISASTROUS FANTASY ON THE PART OF THE PERPETRATORS OF SUCH A CONSPIRACY AND THEIR ACCOMPLICES IF THEY HOPE TO FIND SUPPORT FOR THEIR ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE RANKS OF THE AMRD FORCES."

3. NEXT MORNING'S (JULY 17) EL COMERCIO BLASTED DURAN'S STATEMENT, SAYING THERE WAS NO REASON TO REFER TO SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS IN ECUADOREAN DOMESTIC POLITICS AT THIS TIME; THAT ECUADOREANS ARE LIVING IN PEACE AND HARMONY, A CONDITION WHICH EL COMERCIO HOPED WOULD LEAD TO CONTINUED ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE. CITING DURAN'S STATEMENT AS DISPROPORTIONATELY CRITICAL AND CONTRADICTORY, THE EDITORIAL SAID THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ACCEPT DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW CONCERNING INSTITUTIONS AND REORGANIZATION (OF THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY), AND NOT TAKE THESE DIFFERENCES TO BE SUBVERSIVE. CONTINUING IN THIS VEIN, THE EDITORIAL DECLARED "CONCEPTS AND OPINIONS DIFFERING FROM THOSE OF THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS CRIMINAL ACTS, OR EVEN CENSURED." NOTING THAT THERE IS OBVIOUSLY SOME OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT, COMERCIO SAID "ABSENCE OF ANY OPPOSITION TO A GOVERNMENT WOULD BE INCONCEIVABLE," AND WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT BE WORRIED TO THE POINT OF TALKING ABOUT "AGGRESSION" AGAINST IT.

4. TAKING THEIR CUE, THE LEADERSHIP OF THREE OF THE BIGGEST TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES, THE CONSERVATIVES, LIBERALS, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS ISSUED NEARLY SIMULTANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS ON JULY 17TH DENYING THAT THEY WERE PLOTTING INSURRECTION. FRANCISCO HUERTA, LEADER OF THE LIBERALS, SAID "WE HARDLY BELIEVE THAT A GENERAL OF THE ARMED FORCES WHOSE POSITION IS SO EXALTED AS THAT OF MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT COULD INDICATE THAT HE BELIEVES A CONSPIRACY EXISTS WHEN THERE IS NONE." THE ACTING DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY (THE DIRECTOR, TRUJILLO, STILL CONFINED IN THE

ORIENTE FOR ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITIES) SAID "ALTHOUGH IT IS WELL-KNOWN THAT THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS OPPOSED TO THE DICTATORSHIP AND THAT THE ARMED FORCES SHOULD RETURN POWER TO LEGITIMATE CIVILIAN AUTHORITIES...OUR MOVEMENT HAS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH CONSPIRACIES OR ARMED, BLOODY REVOLUTIONISTS." LIKEWISE THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS: "THE GOVERNMENT HAS DECLARED ITSELF AGAINST ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL INJUSTICE, AND POLITICAL DEPENDENCY (BUT HAS FAILED); AS CAN BE CLEARLY SEEN, IT IS THE GOVERNMENT WHICH IS ITS OWN ENEMY."

5. NEXT DAY (JULY 18TH), AS THOUGH TO PROVE THAT IT REALLY DID HAVE A SOFT SPOT IN ITS HEART FOR A CERTAIN DEGREE OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND A MEASURE OF FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT JULIO CESAR TRUJILLO, NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, WHO HAD BEEN CONFINED TO A MILITARY CAMP IN ECUADOR'S ORIENTE SINCE THE END OF MAY, WAS BEING RELEASED. TRUJILLO ARRIVED IN QUITO ON JULY 21ST LOOKING NONE THE WORSE FOR THE WEAR, AND CLAIMING HE HAD MADE "NO PROMISES TO ABSTAIN FROM CRITICISING THE REGIME."

6. AT THE SAME TIME, DURAN ANNOUNCED THAT THE GOE WOULD NOT PURSUE THE ARREST OF JULIO PRADO, EX-FOREIGN MINISTER, COLUMNIST FOR EL TIEMPO, AND OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT. PRADO HAD BEEN WANTED SINCE MID-APRIL "FOR QUESTIONING IN CONNECTION WITH SLANDER AGAINST THE PRESIDENCY" BUT HAD GONE UNDERGROUND. PRADO'S COLUMNS CONTINUED TO BE PUBLISHED, HOWEVER, AND THE GOE NEVER REALLY SEEMED TO BE TRYING VERY HARD TO FIND HIM; IT JUST LOOKED LIKE THEY WANTED TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THEY VIEWED DIMLY AD HOMINEM ATTACKS AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT, MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY, AND MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF). PRADO TOO HAS NOW COME OUT FROM HIDING, DENYING CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT HE AGREED TO QUIT NEEDLING THE REGIME.

7. COMMENT. FIRST, DURAN SEEMS TO BE FOLLOWING THE LINE WE ANTICIPATED (QUITO 4131): HE ENUNCIATES THE "HARD LINE" ON BEHALF OF THE GOE, BUT THE GOE ITSELF TAKES A MORE MODERATE COURSE OF ACTION. THUS THE REGULAR DENUNCIATIONS OF "THE BURLESQUE OF TRADITIONAL ECUADOREAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY" ACCOMPANIED BY THREATS OF BOLTS OF LIGHTNING AGAINST "POLITICAL CONSPIRATORS AND SUBVERSIVES," BUT AT THE SAME TIME, NO REAL MOVES TO PREVENT POLITICAL GATHERINGS, PRONOUNCEMENTS, OR MODERATE CRITICISM. SECOND, WITH THE RELEASE OF TRUJILLO AND LIFTING OF CHARGES AGAINST PRADO, THE GOE HAS NO KNOWN "POLITICAL PRISONERS". THERE ARE, OF COURSE, SOME BANK ROBBERS AND ASSORTED THUGS IN VARIOUS JAILS WHO, AT AN APPROPRIATE MOMENT, MAY BECOME "HEROES OF DEMOCRACY", AND

THE GOE RECENTLY SENTENCED ALFONSO ARROYO ROBELLY (MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE LAST VELASCO IBARRA GOVERNMENT) TO 280 DAYS IN JAIL FOR MALFEASANCE AND MISAPPROPRIATION OF GOVERNMENT FUNDS. ROBELLY PROTESTS THAT HE IS VICTIM OF POLITICAL PERSECUTION, BUT FEW PEOPLE (OTHER THAN THE VELASQUISTAS) HAVE RALLIED TO HIS DEFENSE. SO THESE, PLUS A HANDFUL OF OTHER FIGURES, COULD CONCEIVABLY BE DESCRIBED BY THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION AS "POLITICAL PRISONERS" AT SOME FUTURE POINT, BUT AT LEAST AS OF NOW, THIS IS NOT A BURNING ISSUE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, PRESS CONFERENCES, PRISONERS RELEASE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975QUITO05462
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750258-0641
From: QUITO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750718/aaaaapuj.tel
Line Count: 180
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 SEP 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <17 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE CARROT AND THE STICK: THREATS AGAINST POLITICAL ACTIVITY ACCOMPANY RELEASE OF TRUJILLO AND DROPPING CHARGES AGAINST
TAGS: PINS, SHUM, EC, (DURAN, GUILLEROMO), (TRUJILLO, JULIO CESAR), (PRADO, JULIO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006